

BEWARE OF THE MIGHTY MAN COVENANT AND BLIND OBEDIENCE TO PASTORS

----- (David Cloud, Fundamental Baptist Information Service, P.O. Box 610368, Port Huron, MI 48061, 866-295-4143, fbns@wayoflife.org; for instructions about subscribing and unsubscribing or changing addresses, see the information paragraph at the end of the article) -

“Neither as being lords over God’s heritage, but being ensamples to the flock” (1 Peter 5:1).

The Mighty Man Covenant is a commitment by church members to form an unconditional covenant with their pastor(s), to support and follow them NO MATTER WHAT THEY TEACH OR DO.

On a recent preaching trip to Australia I learned that Jeff Wade preached on the Mighty Man Covenant at Good Shepherd Baptist Church in Brisbane (the pastor is Wayne Shemish) in 2002. Wade is an associate pastor of Lighthouse Baptist Church, San Diego, California, where the senior pastor is Doug Fisher. I was given a copy of his message and of the materials that he distributed as a handout. The occasion was a Leaders Conference that is held there every year, featuring Doug Fisher.

The Australian pastor who gave me the tape containing the sermon on the Mighty Man Covenant told me, “A large number of preachers from Qld; N.S.W; Victoria and S.A. were present including ordinary folk as well. I cannot tell you whether it was widely accepted. What concerned me though was that there was very little opposition to those meetings to my knowledge.”

The covenant teaches that the church member is to bind himself with an oath to support the pastor even if he goes into heresy or sin. The speaker also applied this blind loyalty principle to the husband-wife relationship.

The covenant is based on David’s mighty men who dedicated themselves to support him as king (1 Chron. 11:10).

The only information I have been able to find so far about the origin of the Mighty Man Covenant is the following: “Mighty men came about as a result of the ‘Mighty men of David’ in the Bible by Pastor Rick Hawkins from the USA. Pastor Hawkins visited South Africa in August 1996 to teach about the ministry of Mighty men. A delegation of men from ‘His Church’ was sent to the conference. Consequent thereto, Mighty men ministry was established at His Church in September 1997.” Hawkins is the pastor of a charismatic church, the Family Praise Center in San Antonio, Texas, which has a television broadcast on Trinity Broadcast Network.

The Mighty Man Covenant has some similarities to the Shepherding movement that developed among some charismatics in the 1970s and 1980s. Influential voices included Bob Mumford and Derek Prince, who taught that each believer should make a covenant with a “personal pastor” or shepherd and agree to submit all decisions to that individual. The result, not unexpectedly, was confusion and spiritual injury. Eventually the movement was discredited and the founders made a public apology.

EXCERPTS FROM THE SERMON ON “THE SECRET OF THE MIGHTY MAN COVENANT” BY JEFF WADE OF LIGHTHOUSE BAPTIST CHURCH:

[I transcribed the following from the sermon tape. The transcription begins about 15 minutes into the sermon. In the first part Wade deals with the unconditional covenants that God makes with man, such as the Noahic and the New Covenant in Christ. He makes the leap of applying God’s unconditional covenants to man making unconditional covenants in the church by referring to the verse that says “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.” Thus, because God makes unconditional covenants, we should too!]

In 2 Sam. 15:19-21 -- “Then said the king to Ittai the Gittite, Wherefore goest thou also with us? return to thy place, and abide with the king: for thou art a stranger, and also an exile. Whereas thou camest but yesterday, should I this day make thee go up and down with us? seeing I go whither I may, return thou, and take back thy brethren: mercy and truth be with thee. And Ittai answered the king, and said, As the LORD liveth, and as my lord the king liveth, surely in what place my lord the king shall be, whether in death or life, even there also will thy servant be.”

Ittai said, “Look, I know I only met you yesterday.” By the way, God did not look on this and say, “That was a foolish thing to do, Ittai. Why were you rash with your mouth? Why did you do something so stupid that the first day you saw this king you made an oath to him; you made a covenant with him?” Actually, that’s what God’s wants.

You would say, “Well, Brother Wade, before I would make that kind of oath or covenant with someone and establish this kind of relationship, I want to get to know them first. I want to find out who they are first. I want to learn to trust them first.” I’m glad that God doesn’t think that way. I’m glad that God didn’t want to see if I was going to be good to save me. I’m glad that he didn’t want for me to do some great thing before he would make an unconditional covenant to save me. He said, “Whosoever will, the good and the bad, the ugly and the pretty, just come on in and I will save you.” Ittai understood this, and I want to show you the two conditions that Ittai used to determine whether he was going to stay in this covenant. In other words, once I make this promise about our relationship there are only two things that can change it. [The first is] “As God liveth.” He is saying, “I won’t break my covenant, my relationship with King David unless God

dies. Or “as my lord the king liveth.” What he said was, “As long as God is alive and David your sucking air, I’m going to have this covenant and I will not break it with you.

Now what was it that made a man do something like that so quickly, before he had time to learn to trust him. Because Ittai knew that David was God’s anointed. He was the man with the plan from heaven. He was the guy that God for some reason had reached down and picked up and said, “I will set you as the king over Israel.” And God had touched the heart of Ittai and said, “Listen, it only makes sense that you are to follow the right man, that you are to follow the man that I picked up. I didn’t pick you; I picked him. So it only makes sense to join yourself to him.” As long as God is living and the king is living, the covenant is unbreakable.

We have been told to have the mind of Christ. God’s method of making covenants is in reverse of the world.

When I went to work with Brother Fisher at Lighthouse Baptist Church, I’m confessing to you, I really didn’t know a lot about and I had a conditional covenant with him. In other words, “Brother Fisher, I love you and I’m going to give my life to you, as long as you don’t do a couple of things. And those couple of things are a very short list. I said, for instance, I want to be in a soulwinning baptistic church. As long as you are a soulwinning church and baptistic, I’m with you whether in life or in death. And as long as you are reading the King James Bible I’m with you. As long as you don’t go parachurch and you stay with the local church, I’m with you. And that is about it. I don’t care how you treat me. I don’t care what you think about me. It’s between me and God about how I am going to treat you. And you don’t even have to enter into this covenant with me. This is between God and me because of who God made you. God made you the anointed one, not me. So I’m going to join myself to you as long as you are alive because God said you are the anointed one and not me. It doesn’t matter who’s is the most talented, who’s the smartest, who’s the prettiest.

Let me read some more. Turn to 1 Samuel 14:6-7. “And Jonathan said to the young man that bare his armour, Come, and let us go over unto the garrison of these uncircumcised: it may be that the LORD will work for us: for there is no restraint to the LORD to save by many or by few. And his armourbearer said unto him, Do all that is in thine heart: turn thee; behold, I am with thee according to thy heart.”

He did not say, “As long as you agree with me I’ll go with you. He did not say, “As long as you are headed toward a goal that I want to go to I’m with you.” HE SAID, “WHATEVER GOD TELLS YOU, THAT’S WHERE I AM GOING. IN FACT, YOU DON’T EVEN HAVE TO BE SURE THAT’S WHERE GOD’S TAKING YOU. The very fact that you are going is enough reason for me to go with you.” Unconditionally.

Now, let’s go back to my vow with Brother Fisher.

WELL, WHAT HAPPENS IF BROTHER FISHER STARTS READING THE NIV?
THEN MY FAMILY AND I WILL CARRY THE NIV TO CHURCH.

You say, "Brother Wade, that's liberal." No, it's not; it's God.

Men, does your wife have to agree with you about what version of the Bible you carry to church? No, why? Because she is supposed to obey me. Why? Because we made a covenant with God. What did you make with God about your family? Simply because God anointed the husband and not the wife. . . . Let me ask you a question, men. If your wife believed something different in the Bible than you do, would it be right for her to submit to you or to take her own sense separate from you? Which one would be right? Of course it would be right for her to go with you, because God has placed you in headship. You expect her to do it.

But then when God puts the same requirement on you, you flee from it. "Wait, I'm the man of God. [we say] Who does he think he is!?" I'll tell you who he is; he is the anointed of God, so keep your hands off of him." So that's what the strength of the Bible is.

You say, "Brother Wade, you are getting way out on the fringe."

O.K. I'm going to show you Bible on it. Think in your minds with me for awhile about two relationships, then I'm going to give you a Bible verse, then we'll talk about those two relationships. The first relationship is Samuel and Eli. The second relationship is David and king Saul.

Now let me give you a Bible verse. Psalm 15:4 says, "In whose eyes a vile person is contemned; but he honoureth them that fear the LORD. He that sweareth to his own hurt, and changeth not." That means that in your good intentions God impresses upon you to make a vow, to make a covenant, and when things go wrong you keep your word no matter how bad it gets.

Why in our marriage vows do we say, "Unto death do us part"? Because it doesn't stop until then. It only stops then. THE COVENANT THAT I'M MADE WITH BROTHER FISHER ONLY ENDS WHEN GOD DIES, PASTOR FISHER DIES, OR I DIE. WHAT HAPPENS IF HE STARTS PREACHING HERESY? THEN I'M GOING TO A CHURCH THAT PREACHES HERESY. Is that blind obedience; is that ignorance; is that being rash with your mouth?

Let me talk about these relationships that we mentioned a moment ago. I want you to think about SAMUEL AND ELI. And Eli was the high priest in charge of keeping the Word of God and God's presence, in charge of keeping the lamp of God lit in the

tabernacle. But he didn't do his job. He got fat; he went blind where he anything; and he completely lost any concern for the things of God. He was still going through the motions; he was still having all the rights, the people were coming, and he was acting like he was in charge. But even though he was blind he could have asked somebody, "Hey, is the lamp of God still lit?" He didn't even care to ask. But see, there was a woman who made a vow to God about her son and that she was giving her son to serve God in the tabernacle if God would just let her have children. And every year she would come up and bring a new coat for her son and talk to him and remind about that promise, that relationship that Samuel was going to have with Eli because she had made a vow to God. And as long as God was alive and she was alive, she wasn't going to break that vow. She made a promise. And here is Samuel now, growing up, after talking to his mom and knowing about the vow and knowing what she had promised and because he was a good kid and knew what the Bible says, he submitted to his mother and obeyed his mother and kept his mother's vow and he would not break it for any condition, even though the man of God that she had joined him to was not serving God right. The sons of Eli had relationships with woman at the door of the tabernacle that weren't good. WOULDN'T YOU THINK THAT WAS ENOUGH REASON TO BREAK YOUR COVENANT WITH YOUR PASTOR, IF HIS CHILDREN ARE COMMITTING IMMORALITY ACTUALLY IN THE CHURCH BUILDING? OR IF THE LAMP OF GOD WENT OUT, AND YOU WALK IN AND NEVER HEAR FROM GOD, WOULDN'T YOU THINK, "WELL IN THAT CASE IT'S O.K. I CAN BREAK IT?"

How about with DAVID AND SAUL? You know David killed the giant and then Saul made him captain of the host, made him in charge of the army. And at that time, he knew who God had anointed. God had anointed Saul, hadn't he? Did God do it or did God not do it? Yes, God anointed Saul to be king. Even though Samuel came to David and said, "Now God has anointed you," David knew that God had not un-anointed Saul, until God broke the covenant not him. See, anointing was a covenant between God and Saul, not between Saul and David. David knew his relationship with God's anointed. "I'm supposed to serve God's anointed; I'm supposed to protect God's anointed. I'm supposed to help God's anointed, regardless of who God's anointed is, not because of my relationship between me and Saul but my relationship between me and God." And David held that covenant between him and God so sacred that even when Saul was trying to kill him, even when it was obvious that Saul no longer regarded God and was only concerned about how he looked to the public. And when he knew that God had removed his hand, he still didn't break the covenant. What did I tell you breaks the covenant? Death. I remember reading the story when Saul was with his army chasing David and his mighty men trying to kill him. And there was a cave that all of David's mighty men were hiding in with David. And it just so happened, by coincidence--no I don't think it was coincidence at all--that Saul came into the cave to use the bathroom. It was a private place where no one could see him--except for David and all of the mighty men, who were pressed up against the cave walls holding their breath. They said, "David, God has delivered Saul into your hands. This can't be a coincidence. I mean, of all the caves, of all

the places we would hide, of all the places he would go, God must have set this up for you finally to take your rightful place as king.” David said, “I will not touch God’s anointed.” When he did so much as cut off the bottom of Saul’s robe, the Holy Spirit smote him. “I have lifted up my hands and have embarrassed the king.” Not only would he not kill him, he would not embarrass him. You say, “Was David a fool?” No, David was maintaining a relationship with God based on how he had told God he was going to treat God’s anointed.

Let me read you Hebrews 13:17, “Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you.” God says, “I want you to have a certain relationship with those people I have set over you.” All authority comes from God. God sets up one and he takes down another. We spend our lives second guessing him, [wondering] why he lifted this one up and didn’t take down this one when he should. Why won’t you let God be God and do what God does. And our part of that is to submit to them that God has placed over us. NOW YOU SAY, “BROTHER WADE, A MOMENT AGO YOU SAID IF BROTHER FISHER STARTED READING AN NIV, STARTED PREACHING HERESY, THAT YOU WOULD STAY IN THE CHURCH, AND CONTINUE WORKING FOR HIM AND SERVING HIM.” I WOULD. Why, because the Bible says here I’m supposed to submit, and that’s good for me, that’s good for my family.

If I go around criticizing the man of God, poking holes in him, being negative, tearing him down, when my family gets in trouble we’ve got no one to go to. I want them to hold him up. I want them to esteem him. But the Bible does say that those who rule over us must do it as they that must give an account. THAT MEANS THAT IF BROTHER FISHER RUINS MY FAMILY, SENDS MY CHILDREN TO THE DEVIL, BECAUSE OF HIS ANTICS, HE IS GOING TO GIVE AN ACCOUNT, NOT ME. I’VE DONE THE RIGHT THING. I’VE JOINED TO MY PASTOR.

Folks, will you make a covenant about God’s anointed, to agree with God of who the anointed is? You see, a mighty man without a local church and a mighty man without an anointed to serve is only a menace. There are going to destroy things. They’re going to tear things down. . . . Will you honor his Word? Will you make a covenant like that? We’re not going to have an altar call. I don’t want you to be rash with your mouth. I want you to go home and think about this. Because once you say it, you’re done. And it will be sin in thee to break a promise that you made.

[This is the end of the excerpts from “The Secret of the Mighty Men Covenant” by Jeff Wade.]

THE WORDING OF THE MIGHTY MAN COVENANT

The Mighty Man Covenant is an actual covenant that a church member signs and agrees to. It makes six pledges in regard to Christian service in the church and supporting the pastor, such as the following:

4. I will submit without reservation to the man of God placed over me. At Lighthouse Baptist Church that man is Pastor Doug Fisher. Heb. 13:17 . . . James 4:7.

6. I will honor this vow to God and consider it a commitment to God and to my fellow mighty men. Numbers 30:2. ‘If a man vow a vow unto the Lord, or swear an oath to bind his soul with a bond; he shall not break his word, he shall do according to all that proceedeth out of his mouth.’”

THE ERROR AND DANGER OF THE MIGHTY MAN COVENANT

1. THE MIGHTY MAN COVENANT HAS NO SCRIPTURAL BASIS.

Wade gives no real biblical basis for making such a covenant in the churches. Nowhere does he demonstrate that it is God’s will for church members to sign an unconditional vow with their pastors. Every Scripture used in support of this covenant is taken out of context and misused. It is smoke and mirrors, bait and switch.

For example, the Scripture texts at the beginning of “The Secret of the Mighty Man Covenant” outline distributed by Wade is Psalm 25:14 -- “The secret of the LORD is with them that fear him; and he will shew them his covenant.” This refers to God’s covenant with men and has absolutely nothing to do with any sort of covenant between men.

The only Scripture quoted by Jeff Wade in “The Secret of the Mighty Man Covenant” that is truly applicable to the relationship between a church member and his pastor is Hebrews 13:17. “Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you.” Yet, this Scripture does not describe the kind of mindless, unquestioning obedience that Wade describes in the Mighty Man Covenant.

I have often preached on Hebrews 13:7 and 17 and exhorted God’s people to submit to godly pastors. I believe in pastoral authority, and I understand that there are many people in this day and age who rebel against pastors who exercise their biblical authority even in the most humble and godly manner. I have no sympathy with that. But Hebrews 13 is not describing any sort of Mighty Man Covenant! This is *isogesis* rather than exegesis; it is reading preconceived ideas into the Scripture and rather than interpreting Scripture in a godly manner, interpreting Scripture by context and carefully comparing Scripture with Scripture.

WHAT ABOUT SAMUEL AND ELI?

There is nothing in the passage about Samuel and Eli to support a Mighty Man Covenant or the giving any sort of unquestioning loyalty or blind obedience to the pastor.

First of all, an Old Testament high priest is not a New Testament pastor. We are comparing apples and oranges here. The Catholic Church has gotten itself into all sorts of error by confusing priests and pastors.

Second, Samuel was only a child, so there is no comparison between this situation and a situation in a church involving fully grown, spiritually mature church members.

Third, God actually used the young Samuel to pronounce judgment against Eli for his sin (1 Samuel 3). Where is the unquestioning loyalty here? Obviously it was not wrong even under the dispensation of the temple for the high priest to be warned of his sin and threatened with judgment, and certainly it is not wrong in a church that a pastor to be warned of and disciplined for his sin or heresy.

Fourth, in fact, the first high priest, Aaron, was sharply rebuked and corrected by Moses in Exodus 32. Why was Moses not afraid to rebuke the “man of God”? Why was he not fearful that he would be “touching God’s anointed”?

WHAT ABOUT DAVID AND SAUL?

There is also nothing in the passage about David and Saul to support a Mighty Man Covenant or any sort of unquestioning loyalty to the pastor.

First, David and others under Saul did NOT give unquestioning obedience to “the Lord’s anointed.” Saul’s own son Jonathan was commanded to kill David, but he blatantly refused and even informed David against his father’s plots (1 Sam. 19:1-7) and made covenants with David contrary to Saul’s will (1 Sam. 23:16-18). Jonathan, Michal, the prophet Gad, Samuel, and others supported David against Saul’s wishes and actually helped David escape from Saul. David himself blatantly disobeyed Saul’s commandments. For example, David stayed away from Saul’s table even though Saul wanted him there (1 Sam. 20). David’s very act of fleeing away from Saul was an act of disobedience against “the Lord’s anointed.” David certainly did not follow Saul blindly and stay with him “come what may.” He ran far away from the man!

Second, Saul, “God’s anointed,” was sharply rebuked for his sin (1 Samuel 15). There certainly was no blind “followship” involved in this situation. There is nothing here to support the idea that the “man of God,” the “anointed” is always right and we must follow no matter what. Samuel rebuked the “anointed” with these strong words: “And Samuel said, Hath the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken

than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the LORD, he hath also rejected thee from being king” (1 Sam. 15:22-23).

Third, when David said he would not touch the Lord’s anointed, he was referring to not killing him. There is nothing in this expression to support the idea that church members must follow a pastor no matter what he does, that a pastor is above discipline for sin and error, and such things.

Fourth, David talked plainly with Jonathan and others of Saul’s sin and of the situation (i.e., 1 Sam. 19:2-7; 20:1-34). Yet for church members to converse about things that are wrong, even in a godly and truthful manner, is construed by some pastors as conspiratorial and wrong.

WHAT ABOUT ITTAI AND DAVID?

First, a pledge by an Old Testament saint to follow and support an Old Testament king without reservation is no authority for a New Testament church member to do the same. As we will see, such a thing is contrary to the plain teaching of the New Testament faith. For one thing, an Old Testament king was a lord, but the pastor is forbidden to be a lord over God’s heritage (1 Pet. 5:3).

Second, even Old Testament kings were not given blind obedience. King David was rebuked by the prophet Nathan (2 Sam. 7). The unnamed prophet in 1 Kings 13 rebuked king Jeroboam’s idolatry and then refused the king’s order to come to the palace and dine with him. Azariah and 80 priests withstood King Uzziah, “the Lord’s anointed,” to the face and refused to allow him to offer incense in the temple, and the Lord blessed their action and struck the stubborn king with leprosy (2 Chron. 26:16-21).

Third, Wade puts words into God’s mouth in this section of his sermon, as he does throughout, that cannot be supported from Scripture and is therefore presumptuous. This is a fearful matter. Wade’s habit of putting quotations into God’s mouth reminds me of how the charismatics like to intersperse their teaching with mythical conversations with God.

The fact is that there is no biblical authority for making unconditional covenants with other men. God can make unconditional covenants because He is God, but frail sinners cannot make such covenants.

2. NOT ONLY IS THE MIGHTY MAN COVENANT NOT SUPPORTED BY THE SCRIPTURES, IT IS IN DIRECT CONTRADICTION TO THE NEW TESTAMENT FAITH.

First, pastors are to be tested by the Word of God.

The Bereans were commended because they “searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so” (Acts 17:11). But it was the very Apostle Paul himself, God’s “anointed,” that they were testing by the Scriptures! When Paul gave instructions about the exercise of preaching in the church, he said, “Let the prophets speak two or three, and let the other judge” (1 Cor. 14:29). Prophets (preachers) are to be tested by the Scriptures. And 1 Thess. 5:21 is all encompassing. “Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.” If we are to prove ALL things, that certainly means we are to prove the preacher to see if he is scriptural.

Those who follow men blindly and do not carefully test everything by God’s Word are described as simple. “The simple believeth every word: but the prudent man looketh well to his going” (Proverbs 14:15). This Proverbs teaches us that a wise man is careful about everything he hears, whereas it is the simple or the gullible or foolish person who gullibly “believeth every word” and refuses to test everything by the Scriptures.

The fact that preachers are to be tested by God’s Word overthrows the Mighty Man Covenant and any teaching that encourages church members to exercise blind obedience to pastors.

Second, pastors are to be disciplined if they err.

1 Corinthians 5 describes the method of disciplining sinning church members. There is no reason to believe this applies to everyone in the church except pastors.

Further, 1 Timothy 5:19-20 specifically describes the discipline of sinning elders: “Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses. Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear.” We see that churches must exercise caution about receiving charges against elders, but if the charges are serious and are substantiated, they are to be acted upon and the elder is to be disciplined.

There is no Mighty Man Covenant here, no blind obedience, no unquestioning loyalty. In Acts 20:30-31, in his final message to the elders at Ephesus, Paul warned: “Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch...” Paul taught the churches to be on guard against heresy, even if it arises from within, and to deal with it. The heretic is to be dismissed from the church (Titus 3:10-11). A pastor that turns aside to heresy is to be disciplined, not followed unquestioningly by a bunch of Mighty Man Covenanted-robots!

Third, God’s Word must always be given preference over human authority.

When Peter and the apostles were commanded by the religious authorities not to preach in Jesus' name, they replied, "We ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29). That is the standard in a nutshell. God is the higher authority, and if a lower authority contradicts the higher authority, the lower authority can be disobeyed. Daniel had the same idea. When the king signed a law forbidding the citizens to address a petition to any God or man other than the king, Daniel disobeyed and he did so plainly and publicly (Daniel 6).

A woman is commanded by the law to submit to her husband, but that is not blind submission. She has a higher law than that of her husband, and that law is God. In Christ "there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28). The Bible says, "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as it is fit in the Lord" (Col. 3:18). The submission must be fit in the Lord. Godly wifely submission is not submission in sin or heresy. If her husband demands that she get a job as a stripper to supplement their income, she is not obligated to obey. If he demands that she submit to heresy and join a cult, she is not obligated to obey. Though she cannot teach nor usurp authority over the man, a believing woman has the Spirit of God (1 John 2:27) and has the same right of private interpretation of Scripture the man does. She cannot yield that right to her husband to the extent that she accepts something she believes to be doctrinal error.

The same principle operates in regard to church authority. If pastoral authority comes into conflict with Biblical authority, God's people must follow the higher authority every time.

As a young woman my maternal grandmother rejected the teaching of her pastors and left the church of her youth, a hyper-Calvinist "Hardshell Baptist" congregation, because in her personal Bible studies she had become convinced that Jesus commands the churches to preach the Gospel to every creature. So she left that church and joined a church that believed in missions and winning souls to Christ. She had every right before God to search the Scriptures for herself and to make that change. As a result, she raised her children in a church that broadcast the gospel and that urged men to trust to Christ and thus saw most of her children saved. She also had the joy of giving a large portion of her hard-earned income to the cause of foreign missions and is doubtless enjoying the sweet reward of that wise choice even today in Glory. Had she been convinced of the Mighty Man Covenant philosophy, she would have unwisely followed her heretical pastors instead of the Spirit of God.

Fourth, Pastoral authority is not a lordship, not a papacy; it is leading the flock not driving the herd.

"Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock" (1 Peter 5:1). And submission to pastoral authority is not blind or unquestioning.

Paul did not say follow me “no matter what.” He said, “Be ye followers of me, even AS I ALSO AM OF CHRIST” (1 Cor. 11:1). He warned the churches of Galatia that if even he himself began preaching a false gospel, they must not follow him. “But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed” (Gal. 1:8).

Wade quoted Hebrews 13:17. He should also have cited Hebrews 13:7 as a companion passage, to compare Scripture with Scripture -- “Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation.” This verse describes the authority of a godly pastor. The authority is not absolute and it does not reside in the man himself. The pastor’s authority resides in his teaching (“spoken the word of God”) and in his life (“their conversation”). He has authority INsofar AS his teaching conforms to God’s Word and INsofar AS his life is in conformity to God’s qualifications (1 Timothy 3; Titus 1). If the pastor takes a path not supported by the Word of God, he has no authority whatsoever to demand that the church follow him.

The Lord Jesus Christ warned the apostles that they were not to act like worldly leaders who pompously “exercise authority over” their subjects. This is exactly what many pastors are doing today, and they will answer to God for it.

“But Jesus called them unto him, and said, Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. BUT IT SHALL NOT BE SO AMONG YOU: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant” (Matthew 20:25-27).

In the Scriptures God warns that His people are NOT to follow evil.

“Beloved, follow not that which is evil, but that which is good. He that doeth good is of God: but he that doeth evil hath not seen God” (1 John 3:11).

In order to obey this command, a Christian must carefully evaluate every situation and reject that which is evil, regardless of its author or source. This explodes the Mighty Man Covenant philosophy that it is not the Christian’s business to analyze whether his church leaders are doing right or wrong, because God will take care of them and hold them accountable. It is, in fact, every Christian’s responsibility to “follow not that which is evil, but that which is good.”

Peter was “God’s anointed,” but he was not given blind obedience by Paul or anyone else in the early churches. Paul rebuked Peter publicly in front of others for his hypocrisy and compromise (Galatians 2:11-14). Paul was not too sold on the “exalt the man of God no matter what” policy. Note what he said of the apostles in Jerusalem, “But of these who seemed to be somewhat, (whatsoever they were, it maketh no matter to me: God

accepteth no man's person:) for they who seemed to be somewhat in conference added nothing to me" (Gal. 2:6).

Fifth, the New Testament forbids oaths.

"But I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God's throne: Nor by the earth; for it is his footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King. Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black. But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil" (Mat. 5:34-37). "But above all things, my brethren, swear not, neither by heaven, neither by the earth, neither by any other oath: but let your yea be yea; and your nay, nay; lest ye fall into condemnation" (James 5:12).

Sixth, even in the Old Testament dispensation a human covenant could be broken if it turned out to be unwise.

Consider Prov. 6:1-5 -- "My son, if thou be surety for thy friend, if thou hast stricken thy hand with a stranger, thou art snared with the words of thy mouth, thou art taken with the words of thy mouth. Do this now, my son, and deliver thyself, when thou art come into the hand of thy friend; go, humble thyself, and make sure thy friend. Give not sleep to thine eyes, nor slumber to thine eyelids." The situation here is someone who agrees to stand surety for a friend and then shook hands on the deal. The Bible warns against this type of agreement (Prov. 17:18; 22:26). Thus Here the Word of God is warning us that if we make a solemn agreement with someone and then learn that it is unscriptural and therefore unwise, we should make every effort to disentangle ourselves from the contract. The Bible does not teach that we must abide by an agreement "come what may."

Seventh, the New Testament teaches that husbands and wives are responsible for their families, and they cannot give this responsibility over to pastors.

It is the fathers who are instructed to bring up the children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (Eph. 6:4). This does not mean that the father will do all of the training but that he will be responsible for it, will oversee it, will make sure that it is done properly. A man who gives this obligation over to a carnal or unregenerate pastor (a pastor who is himself leading the flock into the world or who is not properly exercising godly oversight to the church and is therefore creating an atmosphere in which worldliness thrives) and who thus loses his children to the world, is a foolish rather than an obedient man. And a wife's first sphere of responsibility is in her home to her husband (Col. 3:18). The Bible instructs her to go to her husband for spiritual counsel (1 Cor. 14:34-35), assuming the man is saved, of course.

THE PROBLEM OF PASTORAL ABUSE IS NOT A SMALL PROBLEM AMONG INDEPENDENT BAPTIST CHURCHES

I can't tell you how many times I have heard the expression "touch not mine anointed" misused in the past 31 years since I have been in independent Baptist circles. In my experience, most of those who use this and apply it to pastoral leadership would not go quite as far as Jeff Wade and his Mighty Man Covenant (at least they wouldn't admit it), but they go pretty far with it!

One of the sources for this philosophy was the late Pastor Jack Hyles of First Baptist Church, Hammond, Indiana. He promoted this thinking widely through his writings, his annual Pastors' Schools, and through Hyles Anderson College. Hyles preached many times at Tennessee Temple during my student days there in the mid-1970s and even preached at my graduation service in 1977, but I felt then, even as a young Christian, that the man exalted himself more than he exalted Jesus Christ. Many have railed on me for saying this, but I have not changed my opinion. I believe Hyles did great harm to the cause of Christ among fundamental Baptist churches through his big-numbers-promotion-crazy-pray-this-prayer-and-get-a-ticket-to-heaven approach to evangelism and the church.

He also was one of the champions of the pastoral lordship philosophy. It appears that this trait became increasingly more cultic through the years of his ministry. At his Pastors' Schools he taught church leaders to demand unquestioning and blind loyalty of their people. He demonstrated this in many foolish ways. For example, he would have one of his deacons come up to the platform, then he would repeatedly make a demeaning type of requirement of the deacon before the crowd of astonished preachers, such as "sit down," "stand up," "sit down," "stand up," "sit down," stand up," "sit down," etc. The deacon obeyed instantly and joyfully to this silly demonstration, proving that he was loyal to "his preacher," to "the man of God," to "God's anointed." In one of his sermons that I have on tape, Hyles said, "If I told my deacons to bow down and kiss my feet, they would do it." He also said that if he told his deacons to jump off of a bridge, they would do it. That was probably true, but it does not prove that the deacons were men of God; it proves, rather, that they were silly robots, willing to give the honor to a mere sinful man that belongs solely to the spotless Son of God. By the way, Jim Jones boasted of the same thing, but in his case it was not an idle boast.

The blind obedience philosophy is evident in the following rules for students at Hyles Anderson. I don't know if these rules are still in force since Hyles' death, but they certainly were during Hyles' tenure. They were handed out every year in the work scholarship meetings for the Dean of Women. A copy was given to me in the year 2000 by a pastor's wife who graduated from there in 1989 and now sees the error of this type of thing. The following rules were repeated and emphasized each school year at Hyles Anderson, at least in those days:

Loyalty to Leadership (Hyles Anderson College)

1. ALWAYS think the leader is right. NEVER GIVE YOUR OPINION when the leader feels strongly.
4. DON'T CORRECT THE LEADER ANYTIME! The people are better off hearing a wrong answer than to see the leader put down by a follower. I look at it as a putdown when a leader is corrected.
5. If the leader asks "Is that right?" answer hesitantly and almost unsure the correct answer. To say abruptly the correct answer after the leader has said one thing would be a putdown.
6. Always make the leader look good to others. Saying: "Oh, you know how wise he is," or "If you need help go to him; he can help anyone."
7. Jump to fill the leader's needs.
8. ALWAYS DO ANYTHING THE LEADER ASKS WHETHER IT IS RIGHT OR NOT. Why? a. I trust him to not ask me to do something immoral or sinful! b. If I do something I think will hurt someone, it is him who is responsible to God for it.
15. Never say anything negative about the leader. Not even in a joke.

Thus we see that the Mighty Man Covenant taught by Jeff Wade of Lighthouse Baptist Church in San Diego is nothing new. It was taught, not in name but in principle, at Hyles Anderson College years ago.

How far this heretical mindset has spread through independent Baptist churches I cannot say, but I know it has a significant following.

BLIND LOYALTY TO PASTORS IS CULTISH AND HURTFUL TO THE CAUSE OF CHRIST

This is not a light matter. Unquestioning loyalty, blind obedience to pastors is cultish. It is what the Roman Catholic Church requires for the pope. It is what Joseph Smith and Brigham Young, Ellen and James White, Judge Rutherford, Mary Bakker Glover Patterson Eddy, David Koresh, and Jim Jones required of their followers.

Blind obedience results in people who do not know how to think for themselves biblically and do not know how to follow the voice of the Lord personally. Consider the following description of the authority that was wielded by James and Ellen White in the early days of the Seventh-day Adventist cult:

"ELDER AND MRS. WHITE RAN AND RULED EVERYTHING WITH AN IRON HAND. Not a nomination to office, not a resolution, not an item of business was ever acted upon in business meetings till all had been first submitted to Elder White for his approval. Till years later, WE NEVER SAW AN OPPOSITION VOTE ON ANY QUESTION, FOR NO ONE DARED TO DO IT. Hence, all official voting was only a farce. THE WILL OF ELDER WHITE SETTLED EVERYTHING. If any one dared to

oppose anything, however humbly, Elder White or wife quickly squelched him. LONG YEARS OF SUCH TRAINING TAUGHT THE PEOPLE TO LET THEIR LEADERS THINK FOR THEM; HENCE, THEY ARE UNDER AS COMPLETE SUBJECTION AS ARE THE CATHOLICS” (D.M. Canright, *Seventh-day Adventism Renounced*, 1898).

This description was given by a man who was a faithful member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church for 28 years and who became one of its top leaders. D.M. Canright knew James and Ellen White intimately. He left the Seventh-day Adventist Church in 1884 and became a Baptist pastor in Michigan until his death in 1919.

THE FRIGHTFUL FACT IS THAT THE ABOVE DESCRIPTION OF THE PERVERTED AUTHORITY THAT WAS EXERCISED BY JAMES AND ELLEN WHITE IN THEIR ADVENTIST CULT PERFECTLY DESCRIBES THE AUTHORITY THAT IS EXERCISED BY SOME FUNDAMENTAL BAPTIST PASTORS. If I were to publish Canright’s description of perverted church authority without including the names of James and Ellen White and without explaining who this describes and when it was written, some church members in independent Baptist churches would be tempted to write to me and charge me with libeling their own pastors!

Blind obedience is spiritually dangerous and has resulted in endless confusion and harm. Consider the hundreds of men, women, and children who died because they followed Jim Jones and David Koresh “no matter what.” Jeff Wade says we should follow a pastor even into heresy and sin. What if his pastor told him to drink poison? I guess he would do it, because only death can break his foolish Mighty Man Covenant.

I recently learned of a situation in a large independent Baptist church. This was told to me by three of the principal parties. The pastor was an influential conference speaker. A 12-year-old girl in the church was molested by an adult Sunday School teacher. The matter was brought to the attention of the pastor by the girl’s parents, and when the man was confronted he admitted his sin. He even admitted it to the police and the matter was documented. The parents were told that the issue would be taken seriously, but it was swept under the rug and the Sunday School teacher continued in his office. There was nothing the parents could do because the church members had been taught to give unquestioning loyalty to “God’s anointed” and they had been faithful members for many years. Later, a female church member tried to bring an accusation against the pastor, that he was involved in immorality. Instead of allowing her to give evidence and instead of the matter being investigated properly, she was branded as a “nut” and disciplined out of the church. In fact, though, she was right and the pastor was eventually forced to resign. The confusion and spiritual devastation that resulted from this situation continues to this day, and it was a result of the Mighty Man philosophy (not in name but in principle). By the way, both of the men involved in this immorality are still in the ministry. The child molester went on to pastor independent Baptist churches and is still pastoring today. The immoral pastor, who devastated his own family and an entire church and brought

confusion to the hearts of thousands who knew of him as a conference speaker, is an independent Baptist missionary today.

This is only one story among hundreds, if not thousands, that could be given, illustrating the spiritual danger of unquestioning loyalty toward church leaders.

One of the marks of a cult is *the way people are treated when they refuse to follow the leadership unquestioningly or when they leave*. When D.M. Canright left Adventism after 28 years, he was treated like a fool and an evil man. All friendship and kindness was withdrawn by the Adventist leaders. They even lied about him mercilessly for many years afterwards. This is one of the marks of a cult. People are only treated kindly and lovingly if they submit to the doctrines and “authority” of the cult’s leaders; if they question the leadership or if they leave the church, they are fair game to be treated without mercy. This is exactly what we find in some large (and small but would-be-large) cult-like independent Baptist churches. As long as people unquestionably submit to the pastor, they are treated kindly. As soon as they question his leadership and leave, the kindness is removed and they are treated viciously.

There is only one Lord in the church. To give unquestioning loyalty to a mere frail man is idolatry. There is only One who deserves unquestioning obedience and that is the Saviour Himself, the one Head of the church. And He is a jealous God who will not give His glory to another. Foolish men who exalt themselves, or who allow themselves to be exalted by misguided followers, are on their way to a fall, if not in this life, then at the judgment seat of Christ. A godly man does not want the Lord’s people to be dependent on him; he wants to grow them up so that they are dependent on Christ and sensitive to the voice of the Lord of the harvest. A godly pastor understands that the flock is not his to lead as he wills; that a qualification for the pastorate is that he not be “selfwilled”; that he is a mere unworthy undershepherd who must lead humbly by God’s Word and who will give an account thereof.

Brethren, we must submit ourselves to godly, qualified pastors who are leading the churches according to the Word of God. Many good and humble pastors are discouraged today and need their hands held up through the faithfulness and prayers and support of their people. Not to do so is rebellion and confusion. But we must beware of men who, no matter how sincerely, exercise unscriptural, cultic pastoral authority, regardless of what denominational label they wear.

It is this Diotrephes self-willed rule mentality, this Nicolaitan “conquer the people” mentality that led to the formation of the Roman Catholic Church, with its bishops, archbishops, cardinals, and popes.

DOES THIS ERROR REFLECT UPON ALL INDEPENDENT BAPTISTS?

Someone might say, "If there are independent Baptists involved in such nonsense, I will not be an independent Baptist." But "independent Baptist" is not an organization or denomination; there is no headquarters; it is a description of a type of church doctrine and polity. Independent Baptist merely refers to churches that are Baptist in doctrine and autonomous in polity and that do not believe in denominational structures. When the term "fundamental" is attached to "independent Baptist" it further describes churches that are separatist and "militant" for the truth.

I am a fundamental independent Baptist, but I am not yoked in any way to the men who are guilty of what I have warned about in this report, because there is no denominational structure under which we all operate. A Southern Baptist preacher has made an agreement to be a part of the Convention and is thus yoked together organizationally with other Southern Baptists, but that is not the case with independent Baptists.

I can therefore be an independent Baptist preacher with a good conscience and not share the guilt of this or any other error that some independent Baptist preachers might be guilty of. I can remain an independent Baptist for the simple reason that we are *independent* Baptists!

This is especially true because I do not keep my mouth shut about these things. I do not want to be guilty of supporting error through my silence. I recall a wise saying, "All that good men have to do to allow error to prosper, is to do nothing."

"Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen." 1 John 5:21

[Distributed by Way of Life Literature's Fundamental Baptist Information Service, a listing for Fundamental Baptists and other fundamentalist, Bible-believing Christians. Our goal in this particular aspect of our ministry is not devotional but is TO PROVIDE INFORMATION TO ASSIST PREACHERS IN THE PROTECTION OF THE CHURCHES IN THIS APOSTATE HOUR. This material is sent only to those who personally subscribe to the list. If somehow you have subscribed unintentionally, following are the instructions for removal. To SUBSCRIBE or UNSUBSCRIBE: go to the web site and sign up or change addresses there: <http://www.wayoflife.org/fbis/subscribe.html>. We take up a quarterly offering to fund this ministry, and those who use the materials are expected to participate (Galatians 6:6). Some of these articles are from O Timothy magazine, which is in its 22nd year of publication. Way of Life publishes many helpful books. The catalog is located at the web site: <http://www.wayoflife.org/catalog/catalog.htm> Way of Life Literature, P.O. Box 610368, Port Huron, MI 48061. 866-295-4143, fbns@wayoflife.org (e-mail). We do not solicit funds from those who do not agree with our preaching and who are not helped by these publications, but for those who are, OFFERINGS can be made at <http://www.wayoflife.org/fbns/offering.html> PAYPAL offerings can be made to <https://www.paypal.com/xclick/business=dcloud%40wayoflife.org>]